

Kenai Refuge partners

by Bill Kent

I recently reflected on how many agencies, organizations, and individuals the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge interacts with, and how each of these interactions might be considered a partnership. Some of these partnerships are very formal, with written agreements signed at high levels; others are informal verbal agreements sealed with a handshake, and many fall somewhere in between. Without these partnerships, it would be extremely difficult for us to do our work. Let me give some examples.

Not surprisingly, we partner daily with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) on a variety of projects, both large and small. Wildlife management on the Kenai Refuge, and the remainder of the Kenai Peninsula is a huge task, and we routinely share information, equipment, and aircraft with ADF&G. We also partner with the Chugach National Forest, Kenai Fjords National Park, and Alaska State Parks, because we share many miles of boundary with these agencies, and wild critters have a way of ignoring human boundaries.

The Chugach National Forest and the Alaska Division of Forestry are partners when we use fire as a management tool, or when a wildfire erupts. Additionally, we have worked with these agencies on the spruce bark beetle issue. Certainly, Central Emergency Services is also a fire partner.

We partner with many non-government organizations such as the Student Conservation Association, whose blue-shirted volunteers are essential to our visitor services programs, and the Alaska Natural History Association, which supports our educational programs through sales at the our bookstore. The Alaska Flyfishers' annual upper Kenai River cleanup is a great help after a busy fishing season. The Nature Conservancy has purchased lands for protection of brown bear habitat near the Refuge, and Anchorage Audubon Society members help in the spring with breeding bird surveys.

The partner list also includes colleges and universities across the country (especially the University of Alaska and Alaska Pacific University) which send graduate and undergraduate students to the refuge for

research projects. The education list would not be complete without the Kenai Borough schools, private schools, and home schoolers whose students use the refuge as an outdoor classroom. We also have the Boy and Girl Scouts as partners; there are many scouting projects and activities conducted each year on Refuge lands.

The Kenaitze Tribe has cooperated on a variety of projects, including a recent effort to protect a cultural site at the confluence of Hidden Creek and the Kenai River. Alaska Recreation Management, Inc. is our contractor for the Russian River Ferry, and has provided a great deal of assistance with other aspects of Refuge management. (Speaking of the Russian River Ferry, the Kenai River Sportfishing Association, Inc. recently agreed to assist us with replacing the aging ferry dock.)

And then there are the businesses where we obtain equipment and supplies. Even though they are paid money, without that "partnership," our daily operations would grind to a halt. It has been my personal experience that the retailers on the Peninsula are always willing to help out by checking on the best deal and/or product for our projects. In these days of declining budgets, that extra effort for us is greatly appreciated.

Last to be mentioned, but emphatically the most important, is YOU...each and every one of you who use refuge land and facilities, who call us on the phone or write to us. You are partners with us and help refuge management whether you realize it or not. When you pick up some litter around your campsite, or let us know about an interesting wildlife sighting, or let us know when you see someone violating refuge or state regulations, you are lending a hand to the refuge. We appreciate your help, because without you, our task would be a whole lot tougher. Many thanks!

Bill Kent has been the Supervisory Park Ranger at Kenai Refuge since 1991. His wife Lisa is a pre-school teacher, and their daughter Riley attends SOHI. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.